DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 459 974 RC 023 307

AUTHOR Spencer, Rosalyn

TITLE 15 Small Schools.
INSTITUTION Human Scale Education, Bath (England).
PUB DATE 1999-09-00
NOTE 50p.
AVAILABLE FROM Human Scale Education, 96 Carlingcott, Nr Bath, BA2 8AW, UK (3.50 British pounds, plus 1 pound postage). E-mail: info@hse.org.uk.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Environment; Educational Philosophy; *Educational Practices; Elementary Secondary Education; Environmental Education; Experiential Learning; Foreign Countries; *Nontraditional Education; *Parent Participation; *Participative Decision Making; *School Community Relationship; *Small Schools
IDENTIFIERS Place Based Education; Sense of Community; United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

This report details findings from visits to 15 small schools associated with Human Scale Education. These schools are all different, reflecting the priorities of their founders. But there are features common to all of them--parental involvement, democratic processes, environmentally sustainable values, spiritual values, links with the local community, an emphasis in co-operation rather than competition, and mixed age learning. The characteristic that links them all is smallness, and it is their small size that makes possible the close relationships fundamental to good learning. By good learning, the schools mean learning in a holistic sense, encompassing the development of the creative, emotional, physical, moral, and intellectual potential of each person. Contact information, grade levels and number of students taught, and a brief history are given for each school. Educational philosophy, school-community relationships, educational practices, and grading systems are described, as well as the extent to which the national curriculum and SATs are used. Environmental education and activities, service learning, experiential activities, and exposure to the world of work are extensive. The governing structure of the school, the extent of student participation in decision making, and financing arrangements are described. Advantages of being small and specific problems encountered are also discussed. (TD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original document.

ED 459 974

Human Scale Education

15 SMALL SCHOOLS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
M.E. Tasher
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

A report by Rosalyn Spencer

U233072

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

2

CONTENTS

SCHOOLS LISTED IN DATE ORDER OF OPENING

Page:		
3	**Introduction**	
5	**The Small School,** Hartland, Devon	**(1982)**
8	**Abinger Hammer Village School,** Dorking, Surrey	**(1982)**
11	**Park School, Dartington,** Devon	**(1986)**
13	**Dame Catherine Harpur's School,** Ticknall, Derbyshire	**(1987)**
17	**Oaktree Education Trust,** Liverpool	**(1988)**
21	**St. Andrews School,** East Runton, Norfolk	**(1988)**
25	**Southwark Small School,** East Dulwich, London	**(1990)**
28	**Oaklands Small School,** Goole, East Yorkshire	**(1993)**
31	**The Dharma School,** Brighton, East Sussex	**(1994)**
34	**The Green School,** Huntly, Aberdeenshire	**(1996)**
36	**Bramingham Park Study Centre,** Luton, Bedfordshire	**(1996)**
38	**The Priors School,** Priors Marston, Warwickshire	**(1996)**
41	**Educare Small School,** Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey	**(1997)**
44	**The Galloway Small School,** Kirkton, Dumfries	**(1997)**
47	**The Small School**, Bath, North East Somerset	**(1997)**

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, Rosalyn Spencer has visited 15 Small Schools in England and Scotland that are associated with Human Scale Education. This report details her findings.

These schools are all very different, reflecting the priorities of the people who have set them up. But there are common strands to them all - parental involvement, democratic processes, environmentally sustainable values, spiritual values, links with the local community, an emphasis on co-operation rather than competition and mixed age learning. The one characteristic that links them all is that they are **small.** As all the schools in the report emphasise, it is their small size which makes possible the close relationships fundamental to good learning. By good learning the schools mean learning in a holistic sense, encompassing the development of the creative, emotional, physical, moral and intellectual potential of each person.

The perennial problem which affects each one of these schools is funding and each deals with this issue in a slightly different way. Human Scale Education has always made clear its belief that Small Schools should be non-fee paying in order to be truly open to all. However, some of the schools feel compelled to ask parents for voluntary contributions and others to charge fees, otherwise they would be forced to close. Until the Government makes funding available to all such schools (as is the case in a growing number of European countries – Denmark, Holland, Germany and the Czech Republic to name a few) Small Schools will continue to struggle and their effectiveness will undoubtedly be compromised by the disproportionate amount of time and effort that have to be spent by parents and teachers on fundraising in order to survive. Indeed, two of the 15 schools in the Report have had to close for financial reasons, despite their success in educational terms.

Rosalyn Spencer's Report is evidence of the desire for alternative forms of education that exists in many different communities. It is also proof of the energy, expertise and courage that individuals and groups bring to the setting up of a Small School. Human Scale Education is proud to be associated with their efforts and is committed to helping them become established and to grow.

Fiona Carnie
September 1999

THE SMALL SCHOOL

Fore Street, Hartland, Devon, EX39 6AB. Tel. 01237 441672

The Small School at Hartland opened in 1982. It was started by a group of parents for two main reasons. One was that the only other option available to the secondary aged pupils of Hartland was a large comprehensive school in a nearby town which involved long bus journeys every day. The second reason was that the parents were not satisfied with the style of education on offer in large state secondary schools.

Caroline Walker, the school's current headteacher, explains:
"They (the parents) *were keen to have an education which focused on the whole child, i.e. on the academic, the creative and the practical sides of education. By forming their own school they were able to devise their own curriculum and have the school they really wanted."*

There are currently thirty-three pupils aged from eleven to sixteen years. The maximum number of children the school will take is forty.

The school was set up to provide a secondary education for the children of Hartland, not to cater for special educational needs. Any children who have joined the school with mild learning difficulties, however, have made excellent progress within the supportive small school environment.

The school is now funded by charitable donations (approximately 70% of its income) and voluntary financial contributions from parents (approximately 30%). When the school was originally established it was thought to be the first of its kind and subsequently managed to receive a substantial amount of charitable trust funding. The converted chapel in which the school is based is owned by a number of share-holders who agreed to support the school in response to an advert in Resurgence magazine. The share-holders of the building have no say in the running of the school.

The philosophy of the Small School has been strongly influenced by the work of the German-born economist E.F.Schumacher (1911-77) and his book 'Small is Beautiful'. The education provided at the school is holistic and human scale, intended to meet the needs of the individual child. All pupils are encouraged to take between five and seven GCSE subjects. These are regarded as an external recognition of their achievements and enables them to access higher education. To study for a large number of GCSEs is regarded as unnecessary and restrictive of a pupil's whole development. Pupils are encouraged to follow a broad curriculum which includes creative and practical activities to help them develop into rounded young adults. The fact that equal status is afforded to all subjects whether academic or not has resulted in pupils who would normally be regarded as 'less academic' having greater self-esteem and their performance in the GCSE subjects is believed to be better than it may otherwise have been. Likewise, the 'academic' pupils have no feelings of superiority over the less academic (frequently evident in large comprehensives) and they gain valuable life skills they may not have otherwise gained.

The National Curriculum is not followed at Key Stage 3 and the government SATS are not carried out at that level either. However the National Curriculum is followed at Key Stage 4 to meet the requirements of GCSE syllabi.

For academic lessons the children are grouped broadly by age, but for practical and creative activities the groups are of mixed ages. Teaching groups vary in size according to the activity. Usually groups comprise between eight and twelve pupils.

One of the distinctive aspects of the curriculum is the value placed on practical work such as cooking and cleaning. All the children are expected to help in the cleaning of the school and to take turns in cooking the daily lunch on a rota basis. The pupils have also helped to build a school extension. All of these practical skills are useful life skills and are regarded as valued activities at The Small School.

"When the school first started it had a very Gandhian flavour with the children spinning and weaving and working on local farms. We moved a little away from that during the late eighties and got many more children who were interested in doing academic work. We've always had a number of children who were very practically orientated. So I think that the values we would want to promote are the values that practical work, manual work, is a good thing that everyone should do. We follow the Gandhian principle, that everyone should help to cook and help to clean and help to maintain their environment." Caroline Walker

The Small School has an *Environmental Policy* and the whole school ethos is based on principles of educating for sustainability. Its policy document stipulates that water must be used carefully; energy should be conserved whenever possible; as much as possible should be recycled; whenever possible recycled materials from local sustainable resources should be used; and toxic or damaging materials should be avoided. Also, the school encourages healthy eating, the use of public transport or walking and cycling. The school has recently taken over a local shop and now grows its own organic vegetables. With fewer pressures on the academic curriculum than in a conventional school there is time to discuss environmental issues. The pupils are actively involved in finding ways to address the problems of pollution, waste, energy consumption and use of resources and it is hoped that as a result of these experiences they will become actively involved in working towards social change.

When asked how the school makes the most of being small, Caroline Walker referred to the individual learning programmes, to the quality of the relationships within the school and to the fact that the whole school is able to go to France every year as a group. None of this would be possible in a larger school.

The school has now been running for seventeen years and has become an established part of the local community. For many years the school has helped to contribute to the local economy by buying goods locally whenever possible. Members of the community contribute their expertise to the school e.g. local craftsmen come in to teach various skills to the pupils. Conversely, pupils go out into the community for a variety of different learning experiences, e.g. arrangements are sometimes made for pupils to work on local farms or in a particular business. The school arranged for a boy who wanted to go into catering to spend one day a week working with a member of the local Women's Institute, which helped him develop the skills he needed. The school is also involved in the annual village festival and has given performances at a local church. It has recently been invited to design a Millennium Window

for the Parish Hall. Community environmental work has included beach cleaning and forestry work.

The children at The Small School are involved in the decision making process on many levels. The whole school meets together twice a day, in an informal circle, for general discussions and to exchange news. If, at any time, three children think that there is a need for an urgent meeting special time is set aside and the usual timetable is suspended until the matter is resolved. The academic curriculum is negotiated with the children although certain subjects are strongly encouraged. The pupils have a strong say in the creative and practical side of their curriculum.

The school has recently become a limited company having previously been a charitable trust. It was felt, however, that as a charitable trust the liability of the trustees was too great. The school is now managed by a group of directors with a vastly reduced financial liability. It is believed that the change will put the school on a firmer footing and will encourage more people to come forward to be involved in the running of the school. The new board of directors like the trustees before them are responsible for the legal and financial aspects of running the school, whereas the teaching staff are responsible overall for the school curriculum.

Looking back over the school's history, there have been problems. In the very early days there was a difference of opinion over the school's educational philosophy between the founders of the school and the teachers. Other problems have arisen and been resolved as the school has evolved. One problem has remained constant though - the overwhelming problem of funding the school. The fact that everybody is continually involved in fund raising drains much energy that could be better spent on education.

Reflecting on the lessons that have been learned from this project Caroline Walker comments:

"It is possible to offer a good quality secondary education on more limited resources than one would ever imagine. It requires patience, hard work and humility".

ABINGER HAMMER VILLAGE SCHOOL

Hackhurst Lane, Abinger Hammer, Dorking, Surrey, RH5 6SE.

Tel 01306 730 343

Abinger Hammer Village School became a non-fee paying independent school in September 1982. Dating from 1873, it became a county school in 1909. By 1972 the transfer of all pupils over the age of eight years to middle schools diminished numbers until in 1981 the LEA decided to close a school whose buildings it did not own. Thanks to this latter fact the local community was able to keep the school open without any gap. After a meeting attended by parents desperate to save the school from closure the local community formed a charitable trust which took charge of it.

"The local people whose determination has kept the school open did so because they believed that small children should start their school career as close to home as possible; that happy and secure years from five to eight are the best basis for a responsible and happy school life; that larger loyalties are nurtured by a sense of belonging to a community; that a village is much diminished if it loses its school. All these convictions are supported by educational research, which finds that long journeys when starting school harm both children and parents. In a stressed and uncertain world the village school promotes stability in the individual, family and community alike." Abinger Hammer Appeal Leaflet, October 1987.

The school currently has six children aged four to eight years on roll, the lowest number since 1982, there having been usually around twelve, and for a time twenty. The school has been operating as a first school, taking children up to the age of eight years, but is willing in the future to take children up to the age of eleven. The maximum number of children that can be catered for is twenty. In addition to the main school there is also a nursery which operates every morning and which currently has twelve children, though again numbers have generally been greater. Close co-operation between the school and the nursery not only provides larger forces for music, drama and sports but also ensures a smooth transfer from nursery into the main school when the children are ready.

The school exists to meet the needs of local children so that they can start their education near to home within the village community. It was not initially intended that it should offer special provision to children from another area who could not cope in mainstream education, nor to cater for special educational needs, but children in these categories do attend from time to time. Most pupils move on into the state system.

As the school does not charge fees, its sole source of income is from covenants, charitable donations, fund raising, a small capital endowment and the government funding scheme for four year olds.

The school's main philosophy is that children should be given a sound traditional education, as broad and deep as possible. There is a strong grounding in the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic based on the National Curriculum and the children take part in the government SATS.

All the children, aged five to eight years, are based in one class with one teacher, although other teachers come in to help with subjects such as Maths, French and Music. Some whole class teaching is carried out but much of the work is adapted to meet the individual needs of the children of different ages and abilities.

A distinctive feature of the Abinger Hammer curriculum is that the surrounding area is frequently used as a rich educational resource. The school is situated in an attractive rural village close to the North Downs, and within minutes the teacher can transfer the "classroom" to the wide village green, traversed by a stream, to the wooded sandy Roughs or to steep chalk slopes. The children have weekly swimming lessons at a pool in Dorking.

With regard to environmental values, the children are taught to observe local flora and fauna, they study local crops, farming practice and changing local industries. They make use of village amenities and learn to appreciate the beauties of the surrounding countryside. The school sponsors recycling bins in the village.

The Secretary of the school trust, Shirley Corke, feels that the advantages for a small child of being in a small group at this age are many. There is time each day to give individual attention in Maths and English and every child can be heard reading.

The school is strongly supported by former pupils and the local community not only in all its fund-raising efforts, but in many practical ways too. Villagers look after the school grounds by performing, in a voluntary capacity, tasks such as cutting the grass, weeding, or painting the building. Quite remarkably, the day to day cleaning of the school is carried out by local volunteers. Although there is no church in Abinger Hammer, the Rector of Abinger (a Governor) attends the school on a weekly basis and holds a monthly Sunday service that other members of the community can attend. A community mother and toddler group now meets regularly within the school

Occasionally, the children have held debates, demonstrating a degree of democratic practice. In general, however, they are involved in the decision making process only in such matters as choosing books or the destinations of walks and outings.

The school is managed by trustees who have formed a Board of Governors (including a parent representative). They meet four times a year to deal with the finances, school policies and when necessary, the appointment of a new teacher The teacher reports to the Board and attends most of the meetings.

When asked about problems the school has experienced, the Secretary explains:

"There are, at present, three main problems. The first is the continuous fund- raising efforts, which are never ending and time-consuming. The second is mainly concerned with publicity and image. I firmly believe that if one village needs a school, they all do. There should be no room for competition, only for choice. Abinger Hammer has no access to the facilities of county advertising nor to the resources which state funding makes available to the neighbouring state schools. It cannot easily get across the values it stands for nor the special nature of the alternative it offers. The third problem is the future: many of the people who have been very active in supporting the school, performing many vital tasks on a voluntary basis, are getting older. Who will replace them? Only a means of increasing the income of the school will make it secure."

The Secretary's final note regarding the lessons learned is that you have to be very determined and resourceful to make a project such as this work.

10

PARK SCHOOL

Park Road, Dartington, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 6EQ. Tel. 01803 864588

Park School was started in September 1986, after many months of careful planning, by a group of parents and teachers who wanted to provide an innovative education for young children in the spirit of Dartington.

The school has fifty-six children but can cater for sixty full-time pupils. It is a primary school for children aged three to eleven years, although children are sometimes allowed to stay on for an extra year until they are twelve years old if it is thought to be beneficial to them. The school has 3.6 teachers, a full-time nursery nurse, two classroom assistants and a secretary. It is also able to call upon a number of support teachers to provide additional expert teaching, for example in environmental education.

Although it was not set up to cater for children with any particular special educational needs some children within this category have been admitted and have made good progress at the school.

The school is funded mainly through fee income but it also receives support from the Dartington Hall Trust. Some families receive bursaries towards their fees.

The philosophy of the school encompasses a five-fold approach to teaching children. First of all, it is purposely small, which allows it to fulfil some of its aims – secondly, it aims to address the holistic needs of the child (intellectual, academic, physical, social, emotional and spiritual). Thirdly, relationships between the adults and the children are non-authoritarian and caring. Fourthly, parents are recognised and valued as an integral part of the school. And finally, the curriculum is based on Maths, English, environmental education and visual arts with music.

The National Curriculum is used as a point of reference in Maths and English, whilst Science focuses on the environment. The school does not carry out the government SATS.

An early years unit within the school caters for children from three years of age until ready to transfer to the next educational stage at around the age of six, depending on each individual child's stage of development. The remainder of the children, usually from six to eleven years of age, are taught in family-orientated groups and classes which, while generally age-related, may contain a range of ages as appropriate to the individual children's needs.

The most distinctive aspects of the curriculum are in the school's approach to environmental education and the creative arts. The beautiful natural surroundings of the school are used to the full giving the children meaningful, hands-on experiences. The school is in the unique position of being at the very heart of a creative community on the Dartington Hall Estate.

Environmental values underpin whole school policy. The school is very fortunate in having extensive grounds with a paddock containing pigs, ducks and hens. It has its own orchard,

tree nursery, pond and wetland area, garden, composting bins and greenhouse. The school grows its own vegetables and provides organic, GM-free, lunches.

When asked how the school makes the most of being small, Richard Hickman, the teacher-in-charge, replied:

" Being small we can provide a holistic education, which responds to the voice of the children."

Being situated on the Dartington Hall Estate, Park School has developed close links with other parts of the estate. There are links with the Art Gallery, the College of Arts and Schumacher College. The school has a junior Balinese gamelan band, probably the only one in Europe, which was formed in association with the Dartington College of Arts. Students from the colleges regularly get involved with the school, in particular working on music and drama projects with the children. The school also uses other estate resources including the Dartington archive, the Japanese Garden and the ornamental gardens. The River Dart, Dartmoor and the sea provide valuable nearby study resources whilst the school also undertakes many residential and day trips to places of interest. The school performs at the Annual Dartington Hall Estate Carol Service in the Great Hall. It has an Activity Fortnight at the conclusion of the summer term for both its own pupils and children from other local schools and further afield who camp. It also provides camping and practice facilities for the annual Dartington International Summer School.

Children, and where appropriate, parents are involved in the decision making processes at the school. Weekly meetings are attended by the whole school, with the three-year-olds attending for the first fifteen minutes. Sometimes the meetings are chaired by the children, sometimes the staff. The curriculum is broadly planned by the teachers, but the children are offered opportunities to contribute to this planning and negotiate use of time and approach to the curriculum within the overall framework. The children are generally given more curriculum options as they get older, with parents frequently offering additional options (based on their own skills) within the school. After they leave Park School children normally move on to either the King Edward VI Community College in Totnes or to Sands School, Ashburton, which is an alternative democratic secondary school where the children's experiences at Park School prove particularly valuable.

Trustees are responsible for managing the financial and legal aspects of the school, which is a registered charity. The day to day running of the school is managed by the staff working closely together as a team.

When asked about problems and lessons to be learned, Richard Hickman explains:

"There are the usual day to day problems which all organisations working with people face, but really we are not problem focused. The school is continually evolving and one learns all the time about everything. The school has an active in-service policy. Staff have attended courses in the USA on social and emotional learning and at Schumacher College and have worked on environmental projects in Canada."

DAME CATHERINE HARPUR'S SCHOOL

Rose Lane, Ticknall, Derbyshire, DE7 1JW. Tel. 01332 862792

The school was started in 1987 as an independent small school. Previously it was a village school in the maintained sector until the local authority decided to close it down. The villagers were angry at the prospect of the school being forced to close and contacted Human Scale Education. At that time Philip Toogood was the National Co-ordinator of Human Scale Education and he recommended that the history of the building be explored. It was discovered that the building was not owned by the County Council but belonged to a trust founded in 1744 by Dame Catherine Harpur. The trust deed states that the building belongs to the villagers of Calke and Ticknall for the purposes of providing free education. It cannot therefore be sold or used for other purposes if there is a will to keep it open as a school. Subsequently, Philip and his wife, Annabel, provided the driving force behind the re-opening of the school as a non-fee paying independent small school. They became its first teachers in the summer of 1987.

Twenty-four children are currently on roll at Dame Catherine's. The maximum number the school is prepared to take is forty-five children (that is, three classes each with a maximum of fifteen children). The school caters for children aged from four to eleven years.

The original intention when re-opening the school was to provide an education for the village children of Ticknall and Calke but the school now accepts children from a much wider area. Many parents choose the school because of its educational philosophy, some choose it because of the small class sizes and some children come to the school after problems experienced in the maintained sector. The school aims to be totally inclusive and, although not aimed at children with particular special educational needs, children who have had problems elsewhere make excellent progress in its supportive environment.

Funds needed to run the school are provided by a combination of fund raising, parental contributions, government nursery funding and income from a gift shop run by parents. In the past, the school has received some funding from charitable trusts which helped, in particular, with the early setting up costs. The gift shop, called the Catherine Wheel, is an innovative and successful venture which provides the school with a substantial and predictable income. It is situated in a nearby park which is popular with locals and tourists. For years, as a condition of sending their child to the school, all parents had to agree to work part-time on a rota basis in the shop in a voluntary capacity to provide the school with much needed income (approximately 25% of the school's running costs). It was decided recently, however, that it would be much more efficient to have just a few parents working in the shop as their main contribution to the school. Also, recent changes have meant that parents will no longer be obliged to perform practical tasks within the school but can opt to pay a higher financial contribution rather than offering their time.

When the school first opened with Philip Toogood as the headteacher the school had a distinctive educational philosophy emphasising "learner-managed learning". Since then the philosophy has shifted slightly with each change of head. Polly Sealey is the school's current, and third, headteacher, and she puts the emphasis on "learner-centred education". She believes that "child-centred learning" gives the impression that the child is not responsible for

providing his/her own learning environment. "Learner- centred education" looks at the individual as the "learner" and the school as a place where learning takes place. With this approach the children are actively involved in knowing what they are doing and why. It is the job of the teacher to provide support and guidance but it is important that the individual learner feels in control. The aim is to give every individual learner the skills and tools necessary to find knowledge. Everybody within the school environment is constantly looking at where he/she is going and the children talk about their own individual learning targets all the time. Polly Sealey feels that for learning to take place, one of the most important factors of all is the quality of the relationship between the teacher and the learner.

The school refers to the National Curriculum but does not follow it. The staff ensure that they are familiar with national educational initiatives. All of the staff, for example, took training relating to the Literacy Hour. They then made a decision, however, not to teach the Literacy Hour believing that they would be able to reach the same standards in more appropriate ways meeting the needs of individual children. The school does not carry out the government SATS. The prospectus states that the education provided is about:

"questioning, discovering and exploring - rather than regurgitating given facts - where we go beyond the National Curriculum with no framework of testing."

The children are based in two classes, one with children aged four to six years and the other with children aged seven to eleven years. The younger class has two teachers in the morning and one for the afternoon sessions. Another teacher works with the older children. The class bases, however, are not rigid and there is a lot of flexible grouping of the children. Pupils regularly tutor other pupils, and there are frequent conversations within the school about the two-way process of learning and about the fact that the adults or tutors are also learning all the time.

Dame Catherine's School aims to provide a very broad curriculum. Many parents are involved in helping in the classroom situation and the curriculum takes advantage of the strengths and expertise of the parents. The prospectus states:

"The curriculum is as wide as the collective sum of the experiences that teachers and parents are able to bring to it, and everyone does what they can do well."

The school's curriculum is strongly orientated towards environmental issues. In fact, the school has won Derbyshire's Annual Green Watch Award four times. On one occasion the award was won on account of a solar panel the school had built to heat the toilet block, and on another occasion the school won the award by reducing its waste to nil. It achieved this by having different containers around the school for any items which could be recycled, and any items that could not be recycled were taken home by the children. The children had also written to companies that sent catalogues and leaflets in plastic bags complaining that they were causing harm to the environment and that plastic wrappings were not necessary. The school has a vegetable patch, its own wildlife area and a compost heap, and keeps hens and ducks. Overall, the school focuses heavily on environmental topics across all curriculum areas, so much so that other schools in the area visit Dame Catherine's to learn about environmental issues.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

When asked how the school makes the most of being small Polly Sealey replied:

"The school prides itself on the relationships that are able to be formed because the school is so small. Also, there is so much spontaneity and flexibility. On the day of the first frost the children went out with magnifying glasses and returned to school to enjoy hot Ribena. Everything we do is relevant - it's about NOW and how we're all feeling now. If an argument breaks out we sort it out in a whole school discussion and find that we are able to resolve most conflicts in this way."

The school has forged links with the community by inviting members of the public to school events and by collecting waste paper around the village on a regular basis. Good links have been made with the church, and children have been involved in a non-religious production for the local church with the emphasis on looking after others. The school was involved recently in a local community event which raised money for the Save the Children Fund. It is now more readily accepted by members of the local community who were very suspicious when the school first opened. Nowadays local people get involved in a number of ways. For example local villagers perform an annual pantomime and donate the entire proceeds to the school.

Children are involved in the decision making process at all levels. Regular circle times are held to deal with day to day problems and discussions. Staff help the children in the process of more formal meetings which are led by the children in a somewhat "more official" capacity. The democracy within the school is embodied in mutually respectful relationships between staff and children, staff and parents, children and parents, children and children.

Until recently the school was managed as a co-operative with the whole body of parents and teachers working together. An Executive Committee co-ordinated organisational aspects of school business and other groups were responsible for admissions, education policy, maintenance and fund raising. This method, however, no longer seemed to be working efficiently so the school started looking into the possibility of changing its system of management to that of a company limited by guarantee. It will remain a charity, but will be run by the headteacher and an elected body of five members, of whom at least three must be parents of children at Dame Catherine's.

Over the years the school has experienced a number of problems - one of which has been a certain amount of conflict between parents on the issue of practical input and / or financial contributions. Another ongoing problem has been that of parental "burn out" owing to the continuous demands on time and effort. On the whole parents are finding it more and more difficult to fulfil their commitment to working in the school because of changes in family work patterns. Also, although relationships in a small school may be good, they can be far more intense. Polly Sealey explains:

"You can expend enormous amounts of time and energy not on education but on solving parental problems. Although this seems a very necessary part of running a small school, it can detract from what the school is supposed to be about, namely education."

One of the lessons to be learned from this project is that as time moves on, structures need to grow and change too. Problems need to be dealt with effectively and within a realistic

timescale. The new headteacher has been instrumental in addressing a number of issues and has worked with others at the school towards producing a three-year business plan. One of the main changes that was felt necessary was to replace the existing co-operative management structure in which all parents and teachers had an equal say, with an elected management team. It is felt that the school will be able to move forward now in a much more professional way.

16

OAKTREE EDUCATION TRUST

Oaktree House, 24 Aigburth Drive, Sefton Park, Aigburth, Liverpool L17 4JS

Tel. 0151 727 7231

Oaktree House was set up in September 1988 by Sister Marie Fillingham, a member of the Sisters of Notre Dame, an International Order whose main work is in education. She had taught in secondary schools in Britain and Zaire for twenty-five years, with much of this work relating to young people in informal situations. Through her work, and subsequent reflection and discussion, she began to develop a philosophy of education which resulted in the setting up of Oaktree House. She wanted to provide a unique educational opportunity for children in Merseyside whose needs were not being met in mainstream secondary schools.

"We aim at a truly mixed or comprehensive intake with children from different races and social backgrounds and with a full range of abilities. We feel that children learn a lot from each other and benefit from mixing. Oaktree House is ideally situated for a social mix of students, being within easy reach of Liverpool 8 and across the road from Sefton Park. Liverpool 8 (sometimes referred to as Toxteth or Granby) is a well known inner city area, where there is high unemployment and social deprivation."
Extract taken from: 'Heading Towards Holism - An Approach to Learning at Secondary Level' (Published by Oaktree House 1990)

Now known as Oaktree Education Trust, and as a 'Learning Centre' rather than a school, Oaktree currently has thirty-five students on roll, with a substantial waiting list. An expansion programme has been set up and it is hoped that by the year 2002, there will be provision for 110 students on site and for a further 150 students on an outreach programme. Oaktree aims to provide an education for students aged eleven to sixteen years, although sometimes students stay on longer if not ready to leave.

Since Oaktree's original opening in 1988 much has changed. Sister Marie Fillingham's vision of a unique educational opportunity based on a holistic approach has remained. Over the years, however, Oaktree has become a centre for young people failed by their school and the Merseyside education system. Sister Marie has long since left Oaktree and the centre was beginning to develop a high staff and student turnover. However, since January 1999 with a new staff team in place and under the leadership of a new Education Co-ordinator, Fiona Watts. Oaktree is again moving forward in a positive way.

In a document dated May 1999, the client group is now described as:

- Young adults who seek a more relevant / alternative style of pedagogy
- Pupils who have been victims of bullying
- Children who come from families where there is little value placed on the benefits of education
- Pupils with a history of being subjected to emotional and physical abuse
- Young adults with behavioural problems who have been excluded from numerous schools or behavioural units
- Children from families considered to be below the poverty line.

Oaktree does not charge fees, nor does it request any form of financial contribution from parents. Some funding was received from the European Social Fund towards qualifications - based work with fourteen to sixteen year olds, and also from the private sector. Funding has also been received from a Lottery Grant. At the present time no funding is received from the local education authority or the social services.

Oaktree's main educational philosophy is to help each individual student develop self-esteem and self-respect by building on each person's gifts and strengths.

"Our aim is to show the benefits of nurturing spiritual and personal values within a small-scale educational community. Oaktree's mission is to assist many young people to develop an optimistic and stable personal foundation from which they can enter adulthood as responsible, caring and independent people, well able to achieve success not only in academic and employment fields, but more importantly as responsible citizens."

Oaktree Education Trust Document May 1999

The National Curriculum is not regarded as appropriate in meeting the needs of many of the students at Oaktree. It is touched upon but it has to be presented in a different way. For example, in order to get the children interested in Shakespeare a falconry expert was brought in along with seven birds of prey. The birds were introduced because of the links with falconry in many of Shakespeare's plays. Subsequently the children were sufficiently stimulated to expand their studies of Shakespeare.

Oaktree does not administer the SATS because it is felt that the way they are set and the assessment criteria do not suit their students.

Students are taught in mixed age groups depending on their individual needs. A fifteen year old may be studying "Mind Gym" (Maths) with an eleven year old and be in a different group for a language activity. Each child has an individual learning programme specific to his or her academic and emotional needs, irrespective of age.

The curriculum is continually being reviewed to ensure that it is up-to-date. Many of the children have had bad experiences, have been turned off "school" or come from a background with negative attitudes about education hence not only does the curriculum have to be relevant to the students and based in popular culture, but all subject matter has to be presented in an exciting and imaginative way. Staff have to be careful about the terminology they use when presenting different areas of the curriculum. Using the word "Maths" would have dire consequences, but the children respond to mathematics activities when they are presented in a different way and the session is called "Mind Gym". Golf, for example, is used to teach the students about angles, and other sports are used to teach different aspects of maths.

The students are generally taught in blocks of one or two weeks. They recently took part in a French week when activities included a paper chase of French words which had to be collected to make sentences: they also played boules and practised archery to understand its significance in early French and English history. A two week science block included water sports, canoeing and other off site learning such as visits to museums, and specially organised science demonstrations at the local university. Many sports are offered to the students at taster sessions and if they show enough interest further provision can be set up.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

18

Environmental values are embodied in Oaktree's policy documents and are put into practice not just through the curriculum but in almost every aspect of life at Oaktree. Paper, bottles and cans are all sorted for recycling, and Oaktree has set up a large composting facility. All light bulbs used are low-energy. The outside grounds are being developed so that the centre can become more self-sufficient. The long-term plans include keeping chickens and rabbits, developing an organic garden and pursuing a permaculture project. Oaktree subscribes to a number of environmental associations/magazines including Greenpeace, Women's Environmental Network, Ecologist Magazine, the Soil Association, World Wildlife Fund for Nature, the National Trust, the Vegetarian Society and RSPB with each association having a student representative who handles all the mail and information relating to that particular association.

The staff at Oaktree believe that one of the greatest benefits of being small is being able to be flexible, to embrace things quickly or to dispose of things immediately if they are not working. For example, as soon as John F. Kennedy Jnr. was reported missing and the information was still slowly coming through, Oaktree took the opportunity to research the newspaper reports. This led on to the study of American politics and the history of John F. Kennedy Jnr's father's death. Other news items which have caught the attention of the students and led to in-depth discussion and study have included the horrific schoolboy shooting incident in Denver, the new paedophile laws and the Stephen Lawrence case. Being small also enables everybody to be on first name terms and teachers have excellent relationships with students and their families.

Oaktree is working very hard on its public image and links with the community are improving all the time. The co-ordinator tries to ensure that there is some sort of positive coverage every three weeks in the local newspaper. The students are involved in voluntary work in the community and some local businesses are now offering their support to the centre. For example, a local carpet manufacturer laid carpets free of charge the week before the centre's OFSTED inspection, the students all get discounts at the local bookshop and the local McDonald's has elected Oaktree as their charity for the year. Links with the local universities are good and the centre receives the universities' old computers. Plans for the future include the building of both a multi-media centre and an outdoor theatre to be used by the students and the local community as a free resource. Staff are working out how to ensure that these facilities can be made available to everyone, including the disabled, without putting existing students at any risk. The students also have close links with the Elimu Study School which is an independent centre for black disaffected teenagers.

Oaktree is an example of student democracy in practice. For example, when Fiona Watts applied for her current position as Education Co-ordinator, she was informally interviewed by the students before getting as far as her third level interview with the trustees. The student council meets officially once a month and in the interim period meetings are called if thought to be necessary. There is a student representative for each of the charities Oaktree subscribes to. The students are also involved in the Nebula Project, a programme of learning designed specifically for students at Oaktree which will be used in other education centres and secondary schools if it proves to be successful. As part of the Nebula Project students use a variety of methods to evaluate and assess their own work.

Oaktree is managed by a group of trustees and is currently registered as a charity, although there are plans to become a company limited by guarantee. The trustees are responsible for

the finances overall but the Co-ordinator is responsible for the day to day running of the school.

In the past staff turnover has been a major problem. Staff were working for very little money with lots of unpaid overtime, resources were poor, the students were difficult and the local education authority provided no support. However, the trustees made a decision to employ a new Education Co-ordinator with the specific task of turning the project around and this was put into effect at the beginning of 1999.

The staff feel that they are learning that "small is beautiful", that the new strategies are working and that the time and effort put into public relations work are now beginning to pay off. Since Oaktree's recent OFSTED inspection, which was very supportive of the centre's work, the local council is at last beginning to acknowledge that they exist. They are now looking forward to a visit from the LEA.

20

ST. ANDREW'S SCHOOL

Lower Common, East Runton, Norfolk, NR27 9PG. Tel. 01263 511727

St. Andrew's School was originally set up in 1988 as a small independent day school by Gillian Baker to provide a small unit for children with special educational needs in North Norfolk. On the 1st August 1993 St. Andrew's School Trust, a registered charity took over the responsibility for the school, although Gillian Baker, the founder of the school, remained as head teacher.

The school was started because it was felt that there was nowhere in the area that met the needs of a certain group of children. The school prospectus at the time of the transfer to charitable status states:

"The school meets a need for special education for those children for whom neither a special school nor mainstream education are appropriate. Though these children may have only minor learning difficulties, the effect of these difficulties can be far-reaching. Some children can no longer cope in mainstream education, become very discouraged and lose confidence in themselves and their ability to learn."

At present there are nine full-time and three part-time pupils. Another twenty pupils attend after-school tutorial sessions on different days. The school can take up to twelve full-time and four part-time students, making a maximum total of sixteen children on the premises at any one time. The age range for full-time students is six to twelve years. The age range for those attending part-time is greater, from six years to fourteen years. The latter may be released from mainstream education to attend St. Andrew's or released from St. Andrew's to attend a mainstream school, or they may be home-educated children who attend chosen sessions.

Since the original prospectus entry shown above, the school has refined the definitions of the types of children it caters for. These are now described as having 'communication difficulties'. They may be dyspraxic, dyslexic, aphasic, school phobic or mildly autistic, including children who have Aspergers Syndrome. Children with other problems such as Attention Deficit and Hyperactive Disorder are only admitted if they also suffer from one of the specific conditions listed. Children whose problems at school are caused by their own emotional disturbance or challenging behaviour not linked to a specific learning difficulty are not admitted to St. Andrew's. It is felt that they need an environment tailored to their own psychological need with therapists who have the skills to help them develop. To mix two groups of children whose needs are so different is considered inappropriate.

The school is funded through fee income and local fund-raising. The local education authority pays the fees of most of the children and some parents fund their child's place themselves. The after-school tutorials are all paid for privately. The fund-raisers usually raise over £1,500 every year through singing events, marathons and local fetes. Some of the trustees also organise fund-raising events. The parents find it difficult to get involved because they tend to live far away from the school.

21

The philosophy of the school has its roots in Christianity and, as a practising Quaker, Gillian Baker promotes these values within the school. She explains her philosophy of education:

"I believe academic success is only a tiny part of what education is about. Education should encourage success in all areas of a child's development. This should include aesthetic, cultural, social, physical, emotional, moral and spiritual development. They are all equally important to the well being of the child in society. Concentrating only on academic development fails the child. St. Andrew's is about meeting the needs of the whole child by providing a holistic, human scale education."

The school is obliged to cover the National Curriculum in order to meet LEA funding requirements, but it adapts it to meet the needs of the children. Areas of specific interest and benefit to the children are picked out and studied.

As an independent school there is no requirement for St. Andrew's to implement the Literacy Hour, Numeracy Hour or the SATS. There is, however, a requirement for the children's parents to know what level their child has achieved, even though there is no requirement for the school to inform the DFEE of the levels, or participate in the league tables. Although SATS are not used with children who, it is considered, won't be able to cope, staff believe that the results can actually be helpful. It is felt, however, that they would be more useful as a voluntary activity. When used, the SATS are spread out over several weeks and given in a relaxed manner, so that they are just another form of teacher assessment. It was found that all the children, even the least able, did particularly well in the Science SATS. This could possibly be a reflection on the very positive attitude the school has towards science, and the exciting approach that is used to teach it.

The children are taught across age groups. For some of the time the pupils are organised into 'therapy groups' according to their needs. For example, some children will be grouped for occupational therapy or language therapy while some children with dyslexia will be using specific word games to help with their problem. Whenever appropriate these activities will be linked in some way to helping the children understand any 'whole class' teaching taking place. This in-depth group work is made possible because of the high staff:pupil ratios. The head teacher has three or four non-teaching assistants each morning and every afternoon there are two assistants. During a morning session, therefore, the children are usually working in groups of two or three children with one adult with only slightly larger groups during the afternoon sessions.

The most distinctive aspect of the curriculum is the way the children work in their small therapy groups. An individual learning programme is designed for each child specifically tailored to meet his or her own needs. Then, by working in such small intimate groups with a caring adult, with special needs support woven in, the children are enabled to overcome many of their learning difficulties to such an extent that most feel able to return to mainstream education with increased confidence and self-esteem. The success of the school has now come to the attention of the local education authorities, not just locally but as far away as Scotland. Two Scottish educational psychologists visited the school recently, thought it was wonderful and placed a child there. Nearer to home, a LEA representative came to visit the school for the first time and said: *"I don't know much about the school but I've heard you do miracles."*
Environmental values are not a prime concern within the school, because of the nature of the

special needs the children have. On discussion, however, it becomes apparent that the school has an environmentally friendly ethos almost without realising it. The school has its own allotment nearby which all the children help to tend, and this is very much part of the curriculum. They have their own compost heap and recycle everything they possibly can within the school. This task is made much easier because the local Council operates a scheme whereby waste can be sorted for recycling at the point of collection. All the children within the school have been involved in planting trees for the National Trust. Also, some time ago, a request was made to the local Parish Council that they leave the grass uncut on one part of the village common in order that the school could use the area for environmental studies on a regular basis. This now happens.

When asked about how the school made the most of being small, Gillian Baker explained:

"We just couldn't do what we do if we were much bigger. These relationships just couldn't exist in a larger environment. The individual interaction that happens here would not be possible in a normal classroom situation."

Good links have been developed with the local village community. St. Andrew's is the only school in the village and the local community are happy to support its fund-raising events. The Parish Council supports the school whenever it can, as in the example of leaving the village common partly uncut, and has also donated play equipment for the new school playground. In return the school helps the village whenever possible, the tree planting exercise being an example of this.

As the school is so small and is catering for children with specific needs, some of whom will only be attending for a short period or on a part-time basis, the head teacher feels that making decisions through meetings using democratic practice would not work. She considers that each child's needs are different and uses her specialist knowledge to help them on an individual basis. Giving the pupils too much choice over their individual learning programmes would not be helpful, it is thought, though careful consideration is given to individual points of view and a consensus is preferred.

The school is managed by the trustees of the charitable trust, who deal with the legal and financial aspects. The head teacher is responsible for the day to day running of the school.

With regard to the problems that the school has experienced, as with many of the other small schools, the original problems were financial. The financial problems were solved however when an official visiting the school suggested that the fees be doubled. This was done and at the same time the LEA began to take the school more seriously and started making more placements. The latest disappointment, however, is that hopes for taking older children (up to the age of sixteen years) have been dashed because of difficulties of reconciling Key Stages 3 and 4 of the National Curriculum with the special educational needs of the pupils. However, if the school did not follow the National Curriculum at all, it would be unable to receive any funding from the LEA.

Finally, reflecting on the lessons that have been learned since the school's early days, the head teacher comments:

"We've succeeded because we have tried to maintain a good relationship with the LEA. Now, when they find they are dealing with a child who needs a human scale education, they may send them here. We believed it was important to work closely with them. The feeling was based on the assumption that there are a lot of troubled children out there! We've had great successes, for example, with school phobic children. We've helped them overcome their fears and they have been successfully re-integrated into mainstream education."

24

SOUTHWARK SMALL SCHOOL

c/o 14 Derwent Grove, East Dulwich, London, SE22 8EA.

Tel. 0181 693 5495 / 0171 732 6438

Southwark Small School was set up in 1990 by Barbara and Peter Rundell. Initially Barbara and Peter started the 'school' as a home education network with a group of like-minded people getting together to educate their children in each others' homes. As the group grew they decided to form a small school. Elinor Perry who became the acting headteacher after Barbara Rundell moved away explained that Barbara started the school because she wanted something for her own children which was far more personal than the state sector, yet nothing like a 'typical independent school'. Elinor's reason for getting involved was that she wanted to home-educate her children but didn't want to do it in isolation.

After about four years the group decided that they had outgrown their original premises and looked for a suitable building to form a small school. They succeeded and for three years the group did operate as the Southwark Small School. However, numbers at the school dropped when some families moved away, it became impossible to pay the rent and in September 1997 the Small School returned to being a Home Educating Network.

There are currently six parents and nine children aged five to twelve years involved in the project. A few more families would be welcome to join the project as in the past it has worked well with up to twenty-five children. There is a general consensus that it would be very valuable for the network to have an outside base where they could all meet together at least twice a week.

The project is not aimed at any particular type of child. It is aimed at families who have decided to reject mass education so that they can become thoroughly involved in the education of their own children and that these can learn in small groups with other children. Children with learning difficulties are accepted if the project feels able to cope. So far no parents have approached the project with a child with behavioural problems. It is preferred that families join the project for positive reasons, because they believe in what the network is trying to achieve rather than as a last resort when another system doesn't seem to be working.

When the project was operating as a school parents contributed £50 per month / £600 per annum per child provided they could afford it and this was expected to raise 95% of the school's running costs with the remaining 5% realised through fund-raising. Low running costs were achievable because most of the teaching was carried out by parents who felt confident in teaching a particular curriculum area or a specific project. Only a part-time specialist music teacher was paid. Since the project has again become home based school building overheads such as rent, heating and lighting have disappeared. These costs are simply absorbed into each family's own home running costs and consequently no regular parental contributions are required. However, if an activity involves the organiser in any expense, the parents share the cost appropriately.

When she was head of the school Elinor Perry stated:

"The philosophy of the school is essentially a child-centred one. We base our teaching very much on paying attention to what the children need to know. We listen carefully to some of the difficulties the children may be having. We try to be very flexible in our approach to teaching. If a child is not understanding a concept, we try and find another way to explain the idea. It's an entirely evolutionary process based on what the children need."

The group has no inclination to follow the National Curriculum and SATS are not appropriate for a project such as this.

The children are only very roughly divided by age and the curriculum itself is organised in a unique way. At the beginning of every term all the parents involved in the project get together and plan a programme depending on what they feel able to teach, perhaps stipulating the age group or ability range the activity is most suited to. For example, one parent may offer a history project for older primary children in her own home on a Thursday morning whilst another parent offers Science-based activities for younger children at her own home on the same morning. Other activities go on throughout the week. A family may have two children doing different activities in two different places at the same time and because some parents work, a network of lifts to the different homes is carefully organised. At each session there are always two adults present and usually not more than six children, except at the sports afternoon which most children try to attend. Organisation is good and children must sign up for a particular group for a term so that close relationships can be built up over the term and the children can be seen to make progress.

Regarding environmental values a general policy would be difficult to implement because the school is based in different family homes. However, many of the families belonging to the group do recycle wherever possible; some have their own compost heap and some of the families spend a great deal of time working in the natural environment either in their own gardens or nearby parks.

Members of the school feel that one of the best aspects of their smallness is the flexibility. Because the children are based in small groups in family homes few rules and regulations are needed and, if the children show a particular interest in something, the interest can be followed up immediately.

Children become familiar with extended families, neighbours and local shopkeepers in a number of different settings. Sometimes the children have given music and drama performances in a local church hall and invited members of the public. Links have been made with a local cardboard box manufacturer leading to some interesting project work. The project also makes the best possible use of resources such as art exhibitions, museums and popular attractions within London.

Curriculum planning is a joint effort with parents contributing and children choosing what they want to do. Within the small groups the children are also given a chance to have their say and help provide the direction of the activity.

The project is overseen or managed by the former head of the small school and the treasurer, both of whom are also parents within the scheme.

26

The main problems encountered by the project have been connected with finding suitable premises and the subsequent running costs. There were also some problems relating to parental involvement within the school but since the project has reverted to being home-based these problems have disappeared.

Alexandra Harley, one of the parents who has been involved with the project for a number of years commented:

"To make it work you need tact, diplomacy, drinks of tea and flexibility. There have also been times when we have felt that some ground rules have become necessary to stop people taking advantage of the project."

27

OAKLANDS SMALL SCHOOL

Oaklands Small School, formerly the New School, was set up in 1993 by Rosalyn Spencer herself and closed in 1997. It has been included in this report because of some of the lessons that were learned over the duration of the project.

The New School opened in temporary premises in Goole, East Yorkshire in September 1993. Soon after a sympathetic benefactor purchased a listed building originally built in 1834 as a Sunday school, with the purpose of allowing The New School to use it free of any rental charge, in return for maintaining it in good condition. Consequently in January 1994, just one term after opening, the school moved into its new premises in an idyllic setting on the banks of the River Aire and was re-named 'Oaklands Small School'.

The school was started by a group of parents who had connections with a private nursery school in Goole and who had concerns about their children's futures upon transferring to mainstream education. The children had been used to a caring environment with a high staff:child ratio and would suddenly become part of a large reception class where it was unlikely, the parents felt, that their individual needs could be catered for. Early meetings received a lot of publicity in the local press and just before the school opened many enquiries were received from parents requesting places for older primary school children who were having problems within mainstream education.

The school opened initially with twelve primary-aged pupils ranging in age from four to ten years. Three years later there were twenty four children on roll, aged from four to fifteen years, including some home-educated children who attended on a part-time basis.

The main purpose of the school was to provide an education geared to the needs of small groups of children in a small-scale, family-like environment. It was never the intention of the school to be a special school but by its very nature it attracted children who were having problems in mainstream education. Parents of reception aged children chose the school because of its alternative philosophy. Most of the older children, on the other hand, had had problems in mainstream education, for example bullying, a learning difficulty such as dyslexia, poor health or difficulty coping in a large class.

The school was funded by voluntary contributions from parents, trust grants, charitable donations and an exhausting fund-raising schedule. For the first three years of its existence the school received £10,000 a year from a large trust fund and was also fortunate in being able to use its premises free of charge initially. Unfortunately, after eighteen months, the benefactor's financial position changed and the school had to start paying a substantial rent at a commercial level. Twelve months later the trust funding ceased and the school just could not survive financially any longer. After three years of successful operation it was forced to close down.

The school's philosophy was: to provide a human scale education; to develop body, mind and spirit in a holistic way; to nurture each child's self-esteem in a caring family atmosphere; to develop meaningful relationships between all members of the school (adults and children); to develop an enquiring mind, self-motivation and a desire for life-long learning.

Aspects of the national curriculum were used as guidance in case children needed to transfer back into mainstream education at a later date. It was agreed by parents and the trustees that the school would not administer SATS.

The curriculum was offered to the children at different levels in small groups and there was always flexibility in the way the children were grouped. A particularly bright five year old was able to join a group of older children (mainly seven and eight year olds) for a number of different activities including English and Science, but then re-join the four year olds for water and sand play. The children also taught each other. On one occasion, for example, a ten year old boy carefully prepared a lesson to show the youngest children how boats moved through locks by using the water tray to demonstrate and worksheets he had designed himself to make sure the younger children had understood the principle. On another occasion a home-educated child brought in his moth collection and shared his knowledge with adults and children alike. Not only did the other children benefit from this experience but the home-educated child managed to overcome his shyness and gained a great deal of self-confidence in the process. When secondary level education was introduced after the school had been open for two years, secondary pupils were normally taught separately for English, Maths, French and Science but they mixed with the younger pupils during breaks and for creative and practical subjects.

The most distinctive aspect of the curriculum was perhaps its flexibility to suit individual needs. Furthermore, the non-academic side of the curriculum, particularly in respect of self-esteem building and social relationships, was held to be all important. It was believed that children could not learn properly unless these aspects were addressed.

The school strived to make the children aware of environmental issues. As much as possible was recycled. The school had its own compost container, grew its own vegetables and made visits to an organic farm. During the school's third year a project was undertaken to re-design the school playground, making the best use of the natural environment. Included in the design was a plan to generate energy from the tidal river running alongside the school for electricity in the school.

Being small made it possible for social relationships and individual needs to be given priority. Time was not wasted by having to organise and discipline large groups of children. The children were treated as responsible citizens and consequently behaved as such. And, importantly, it was easy to deviate from planned activities if an unexpected learning opportunity came along.

The school built up links with the community from the very beginning. Initially the school held regular open days to which members of the public were invited. Every year the school produced a concert and the children sent out personal invitations to the villagers asking them to attend. Some people would always arrive, sometimes bearing a small gift for the child who had invited them. Children from the local state primary school also attended Oaklands' Annual Concert. An After-School Kids' Club was set up, based at Oaklands but with arrangements to collect other children daily from the local state school. During Oaklands' final year, a monthly Craft Fair and Coffee Shop was held and again members of the local village and the wider community attended on a regular basis.

With regard to democratic practice every morning the children and staff had a 'circle time' or 'whole school meeting' where decisions would be made about the day or week ahead, with

children and staff participating equally. Decisions would be made about jobs that needed doing around the school and about who would do them. When secondary-aged pupils joined the school they were consulted on most issues that concerned them, but final decisions on serious matters were made by the teachers and the trustees, sometimes in consultation with parents.

The school was a registered charity and was managed on a day to day basis by the headteacher, with important decisions being made in consultation with the charity trustees. The trustees were a group of five professional people, including a solicitor and a further education lecturer, who were responsible overall for the financial and legal aspects of running the school. The school aimed to be 'a parent run school' and regular parents' meetings were held to discuss numerous issues relating to the running of the school.

The school experienced a number of problems and eventually was forced to close down after three years as stated. Funding the school was a constant strain. Many of the families attending the school were on a below-average income and could not afford to make any financial contributions to the school, some struggled to make financial contributions that became increasingly burdensome to them and some abused the system by saying they couldn't afford to pay anything, yet enjoyed holidays abroad. Some parents offered time in lieu of payment and, although in most cases this worked well with jobs being carefully matched to the parent, on some occasions it became problematic in that the parent's help was undesirable for one reason or another. Staff worked for low salaries and some teachers felt compelled to work in a voluntary capacity so that the school could stay open. At times fund-raising activities were fun, but over a period of time they became a considerable strain. Accepting secondary pupils after the school had been open for just two years was perhaps a mistake. Initially the idea had been to let the existing primary children grow into the secondary group, in an organic way, but as the decision to take secondary pupils became known in the area, applications occurred and Oaklands finished up accepting six secondary pupils from outside the school. Their arrival caused problems in that these pupils found it hard to 'drop the baggage' they brought with them. Another problem was deciding what is a 'parent-run' school and trying to create a balance between giving parents an element of control and maintaining stability for the children. Often parents were concerned with the 'here and now' and how a decision would affect their own child, with little thought being given to the other children and to the long term future of the school.

The lessons that have been learned from this project are many and varied. First of all, the idea of 'voluntary' parental contributions was fraught with problems from the start. Looking back, the school should have been stricter about minimum contributions. Fund raising activities were also a source of tension and in the end it was always the same group of people who exhausted themselves doing all the necessary work. The school was forced to close down because of the lack of funding, but there was also an important element of 'burn out'. The efforts that had to be made to keep the school going and the immense personal sacrifices that had to be made by some individuals just seemed to be too great.

THE DHARMA SCHOOL

The White House, Ladies Mile Road, Patcham, Brighton, East Sussex

BN1 8TB.

Tel. 01273 502055

The Dharma School in Brighton, which is the first primary school in the UK to be based on Buddhist principles, started its life in the front room of a parent's house in September 1994. By June 1995 the school had moved into permanent premises, a magnificent detached building built in the 1930's with beautiful grounds.

A group of people first met in 1991 to discuss whether or not a Buddhist school would be feasible. They agreed that it would, and that it would be best to start with a primary school, and maybe open a secondary school at a later stage. They formed a group of directors to set the wheels in motion and The Dharma School Trust was set up in 1992. A leaflet provided by the Trust stated: *"The school will be open to children of all cultural and religious backgrounds, and will be Buddhist in the values imparted rather than in the formal study of scriptures and doctrine."*

Kevin Fossey, the school's current headteacher, was actually the head of a large state primary school when the early planning meetings were taking place. However, he was involved with the project from the outset as one of the directors. He was also a member of the Human Scale Education local group and was aware of the successes some of the small schools inspired or supported by Human Scale Education have achieved and of some of the difficulties they regularly encounter. He firmly believed in the small school movement and joined the Dharma School as a teacher one year after it opened.

The school has now been open for five years and is full to capacity with sixty-five children on roll aged from three to eleven years. Other children are on the waiting list in the hope that they too may one day join the school.

Some children with special educational needs have been accepted into the school and have made good progress but a balance needs to be maintained with other pupils so that all children can receive the appropriate help and support. Likewise, the school is wary of accepting pupils with known behavioural problems but would feel able to cope with a maximum of one per class to avoid disrupting other children.

The school was helped at the outset by a substantial amount of trust funding. It is now funded by charitable donations (approximately 20%); fund raising (approximately 5%); and fees (approximately 75%). The fees are currently set at £833 per term but some pupils receive bursaries. All the teaching staff are fully qualified and have had experience in mainstream education, but salaries are substantially less than teachers within the state sector receive. Costs are also kept down by a substantial amount of direct parent participation.

The philosophy of the school is based on the principles of Buddhism, of which the basic tenets are impermanence and interdependence, i.e. the belief that nothing is permanent, nothing lasts for ever, everything is in a state of change and everything in life is

interdependent. The children are made aware of their responsibilities in relation to themselves and others. In addition to the subjects taught in most other schools time is made available everyday to meditate and to learn a little more about Buddhist principles and ethics including the development of compassion and the five precepts.

"The influence of Buddhism in the school is felt not through dogma, tradition or ritual, but through exploring basic principles in a way appropriate to each age group. These include resourcefulness, honesty, co-operation, concentration and self-discipline."

School Prospectus

The National Curriculum is used as a point of reference but is not followed rigidly. The school strongly believes that education should not be about attainment targets, and therefore, does not administer the government's SATS.

The children are split into classes according to age and there are now three classes. In many ways the teaching within each class is not dissimilar to teaching in mainstream education, the main difference being that the classes are smaller and the whole ethos of the school helps to create a peaceful atmosphere in each classroom.

The school offers an integrated curriculum and works mainly on a topic approach. There is a connection with National Curriculum topics so that children are prepared for their move on to secondary school. The topic approach is compatible with the Buddhist belief that everything is inter-related. Over the period of a week the children will have studied a range of subjects relating to the topic. One of the weekly sessions held is a self-esteem-building session which is intended to help the children work co-operatively with one another. Ways of dealing with problems the children may have in any of their relationships are also discussed. If there is ever conflict between the children it is dealt with promptly and effectively in a non-judgemental way. Last year the children travelled to London to have a meeting with the Dalai Lama and they asked him what was the best thing they could do in school. His reply, *"to develop a good heart"* reinforced the emphasis the school puts on relationships, over and above that of academic achievement. Another distinctive aspect of the curriculum is the time and space provided in each day for quiet contemplation, reflection and meditation.

"A short Buddhist 'puja' at which the children take part in quiet reflection and focus on the spiritual quality of life is offered daily, sometimes close to the end of the day so that parents may arrive early to take part." School Prospectus.

Environmental values underpin whole school policy and the curriculum. Since acquiring the existing premises the garden has been developed. There is a vegetable area, a pond, a wildlife area and a gardening plot for each child. There is a paper recycling bin in every classroom, and bottles, cans and cardboard are collected at a central spot. The school only has two bags of rubbish every week - not bad with sixty children!

Kevin Fossey believes that the most important aspect of being small is the quality of the relationships. He would never go back to teaching huge numbers again. Interestingly, the school is beginning to attract attention from educational psychologists and teacher training agencies who can see how well the school is working. In fact, the local education authority is now paying for a classroom assistant for one child with special educational needs to attend the school because they can see the benefits such a school brings.

32

One of the ways in which the school has built links with the local community has been by inviting people to the school's assemblies and talks. Kevin Fossey has also visited mainstream schools to speak in their assemblies. In the past ten months alone the school has received over three hundred and fifty visitors.

The Dharma School believes in giving children a democratic say in the running of the school, although this is usually done on an informal basis. In the past the school experimented with formal meetings but the children seemed to find them difficult. Generally, the children are asked for their opinions on a day to day basis and sessions relating to the planning of the curriculum are shared with the children. Sometimes the children request a whole school meeting to plan a special event such as a school fair or a fund raising event.

The school is managed by a group of directors but staff, parents and pupils are all responsible for making certain decisions. Staff are responsible for the day to day administration and staff and pupils are involved in curriculum planning. The school is cleaned by paid parents and staff. Overall, the head leads, co-ordinates and delegates all of these tasks.

Funding is still the biggest problem experienced by the school. The school is now coming up to its sixth year and is having to become stricter about full fees being paid. Up until now many children have received bursaries or only paid partial fees but the school cannot go on sustaining this level of support. The same staff have been at the school for almost three years but the teachers are finding it more and more difficult to survive financially in the long term on such a low wage. When teaching jobs are advertised the response is overwhelming but some people are put off as soon as they learn what the salary is. The staff are all in agreement that the lack of money is a difficulty. They also agree that the intensity of relationships in a small school can be a challenge.

Reflecting on the lessons that have been learned from this project, Kevin Fossey says:

"It is quite amazing to discover that you can do it - that you can be successful! The school generally has good relationships and a sense of calm about it - which is philosophy in action. The academic side is good. And of the children that have left us for whatever reason 80% have moved back. We've learned a lot of lessons along the way - not to be over-stretched, and the need to say 'no' sometimes. It's down to the whole notion of experience."

THE GREEN SCHOOL

The Green School was opened in Huntly, Aberdeenshire, Scotland in September 1996 by Canadian born Liza Ireland. Unfortunately the school was forced to close after only eighteen months because of problems with funding and finding suitable premises. It has been included in this report because of the emphasis placed on educating for sustainability which others may be able to learn from.

Liza Ireland started the Green School because she was unhappy with the way her daughter was being taught in the state system and she had concerns for her son who was due to start school shortly. She had a strong background in environmental education and educating children outdoors and was already looking at ways of promoting 'Education for Sustainability' as part of her Ph.D. research degree. She decided that she could put some of her findings to good use and help her own children, and others, by starting a small school.

During the summer term of 1997 the school had eight full-time and three part-time pupils aged from five to twelve years. The school was open to children of all abilities.

The school was funded initially by parental contributions which provided approximately a third of the costs, but the only way the school could survive was for Liza to work as the full-time teacher without taking a salary. When parents became aware of the situation they became more involved in fund-raising.

The whole philosophy of the school was based on educating for a sustainable future:

"The idea is to promote environmental sustainability, which is learning to live on the earth so that we don't degrade the earth and its life support systems, for the plants around us, for the animals around us. With that in mind, you have to look at how the environment works, which tends to be in a very integrated fashion, in a holistic fashion. Our state education system tends to break learning into separate subjects for efficiency. But that model is based on the industrial age when you broke the machine into different parts and then somehow it all gets put back together. I don't think knowledge works in that way." Interview with Liza Ireland - July 1997

The school did not teach the Scottish equivalent of the National Curriculum nor use their equivalent method of assessments to the English SATS.

As there was only one teacher the children of all ages were taught together, although they were split into small groups or taught on a one to one basis as necessary.

The most distinctive aspect of the curriculum was that the children were taught in a totally integrated away with the emphasis always being on **sustainability**. They found out where things came from, how they were used and what happened to them when they are no longer required. If they were doing a project on wool, for example, they would not only learn about the processes of obtaining the wool from sheep and the various manufacturing methods used until eventually it became an item of clothing. They would also learn about the effects that different forms of manufacturing the wool could have on the environment, what effects washing the product could have on the environment, and what choices are available when a woollen item of clothing is no longer required with regards to recycling and dealing with

decomposition. The children were taught to question the effect on the environment of everything they did.

" The children are motivated to learn and they know how to learn and how the world functions. They are an integrated whole with the rest of the world. They're involved in a very dynamic environment and they're not separate from it. Everything they do affects the environment and the environment in turn affects them. They see relationships in everything they do, every choice they make, in their behaviour, in the way they function. They learn to think 'Wait a minute, does what I am about to do affect the environment? Would it in turn affect me? Is this making a sustainable choice?' So through the education that we're offering I hope it'll become natural to them to make sustainable choices, to live sustainably and to help others to do the same." Interview with Liza Ireland - July 1997

Hence environmental values underpinned everything that happened in the school. All equipment purchased or made for the school was obtained after first taking environmental concerns into consideration. The children wrote on slates for activities such as writing practice, used plastic covered worksheets for maths activities (which could be cleaned and used again) and worked outdoors using the natural environment whenever possible. The school had a long term plan to build an eco-centre which could be used as a school and would be shared by other groups.

The Green School was very small and like an extended family. Everybody knew everybody else well and understood each other's strengths and weaknesses. Other family members such as grandparents and aunts became involved in the school and helped in the classroom or with the cooking of the midday meal.

Initially the school was managed by Liza Ireland herself with her husband taking care of the financial side. One parent acted as treasurer and another parent took care of the publicity. As the school developed parents generally became more involved and started to become included in the decision making process.

Like most of the small schools, The Green School struggled constantly to survive financially and, also like many other small schools, it had problems finding suitable premises. Initially the school operated from the first floor of a large manor house in beautiful grounds because the owner of the property was sympathetic to the cause and wanted her young daughter to attend the school. However, as time progressed, the owner of the property changed her mind about her daughter's education and asked the school to find other premises. This caused considerable problems for the school and in the end Liza Ireland was so exhausted by a battle with the planning authorities regarding a possible new building for the school and by the continuous battle to survive with no financial reward for herself that she gave up the fight and decided to home educate her own children instead. She still hopes to be able to re-open the school at some stage in the future.

When asked what lessons had been learned from this project she said:

"To survive with an innovative project you need to be in a more 'forward thinking' area. I plan to start another Green School but next time it will be in Canada!"

BRAMINGHAM PARK STUDY CENTRE

Bramingham Park Church, Freeman Avenue, Luton. Tel. 01582 494696

Bramingham Park Study Centre opened its doors as an independent study centre in April 1996. Before that it had been part of an initiative set up by Jan Grayson and two of her colleagues while they were working for the local education authority as "home tutors". They felt that tutoring in children's own homes was an expensive option for the local education authority, that time available for each student was limited, that some pupils felt isolated and that many students on the waiting list had not received any tuition at all. They suggested that a much better solution would be for students to attend a study centre where they could be taught in small groups. Subsequently two such study centres were set up by Jan and her colleagues as employees of the LEA. However, the LEA decided to withdraw this facility after two years and made Jan Grayson and her two colleagues redundant. The students at the time and their parents were devastated and pleaded with the staff to try and keep the centre going. And that was exactly what they did.

Jan Grayson and her two colleagues, all practising Christians and members of the Bramingham Park Church, felt that helping the students in the way they were helping them was doing God's work. In consequence they worked for very little financial reward in their struggle to keep the centre open.

Three years on the centre is proving to be a great success and is full to capacity with twenty students aged from thirteen to seventeen years attending any one session, with some children attending on a full time basis and some on a part-time basis. In addition, fifty children who are in mainstream education attend on Saturday for extra help and tuition with their school work.

The centre is aimed at particular groups of children: the sensitive or vulnerable; school refusers; those who have been bullied or traumatised and teenage mums. Although in the past the Centre has also made provision for children with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties this is no longer going to be the case as the local authority has agreed to make provision for these children elsewhere. Many of the children who attend the special sessions on Saturday are dyslexic.

Many children are funded directly by their own schools, some have been funded by their parents, but more and more children are being funded by the LEA. It is encouraging that the LEA is now willing to fund placements and to refer students to the centre. Some children may only attend for a short period of time and may then return to mainstream education, others stay at the centre until they have completed their "schooling".

The centre has a strong Christian ethos and much of its philosophy can be understood from the following extract which is taken from a letter to new students:

"We work together in a friendly, informal atmosphere to help and support one another. The reasons for attending Bramingham Park Study Centre are varied. We respect and value each individual and do not judge one another on past performance, however good or bad. We are interested in helping one another develop, learn and improve in areas in which we are weak,

and encourage further achievement in our strengths. We look ahead to your future, not backwards at your past. All we ask of you is that you do the same."

The National Curriculum is taught but is adapted to meet the needs of individual children. Although the centre does not carry out the government SATS, some of the schools paying for places will provide them for their Year 9 pupils. The children are usually taught individually or in twos or threes, with children of similar age and ability working together.

The curriculum covers a range of subjects at Key Stages 3 and 4, including GCSE's. Drama is a particularly strong curriculum area as this is felt to be good for social skills. Physical education sessions are held at a local leisure centre. Arrangements are also made for the children to play tennis and golf.

Although there is no written policy on environmental issues, the centre is "environmentally friendly" and encourages recycling. Environmental issues such as the need to keep litter and pollution down to a minimum are frequently discussed with the students.

The staff feel that the main advantage of being small is that individual needs can be catered for and met.

As the centre is based in a section of a church building the students have formed good links with the church. Students attend some church activities and likewise church members support the centre. In terms of links with the outside community students have used local retailers to provide work experience opportunities for them.

The centre operates on the belief that the students should have a say in the decision making process. At least once a week, and more often as necessary, the centre holds a universal meeting, rather like a Circle Time, but called *Smart Time*. The meeting starts with an open discussion and exchange of news and ends with a prayer. If a student or member of staff wants anything in particular discussed, they can enter it in the *Smart Time Book*. Students' views are taken into account when forming the centre's policy. Each student plays a part in planning his or her own learning programme.

The centre is managed as a registered co-operative limited by guarantee with most of the staff members being directors. Consequently the staff are in a position to make decisions about the centre and they are responsible for legal and financial matters.

One of the problems encountered by the centre has been admitting too many new children during any particular period. Each child brings new and different problems and in the past behaviour management has become a key issue.

On reflection Jan Grayson felt that perhaps the most valuable lesson to be learned from this project is the need to specialise and to learn to say "no" to taking on some children.

37

THE PRIORS SCHOOL

School Lane, Priors Marston, Warwickshire, CV23 8RR. Tel. 01327 260527

The Priors School opened as a small community-run independent school in September 1996 but before that had existed as a village school since 1847 (almost 150 years). The school's change in status came about because the local education authority made a decision to close the state run school in the village of Priors Marston and to bus the primary-aged children residing in the village to a larger school about five miles away.

A number of villagers protested to try and prevent the school's closure. They felt very strongly that children of the village should be entitled to have a school within their own community and should not be bussed out of the village. Realising that they were fighting a losing battle, they sought the advice of Human Scale Education who put them in touch with Dame Catherine Harpur's School at Ticknall. Dame Catherine's had been in a similar situation to The Priors School and they had succeeded in becoming an independently run small school. It was found that, just as the Dame Catherine's building had been entrusted to the village of Ticknall, so had the village school at Priors Marston been entrusted to the village "for ever" by Earl Spencer. Therefore, after a lot of hard work, fund-raising and a high profile campaign which attracted the attention of the national media, the school closed in the summer as a local authority run school, and re-opened at the beginning of the autumn term as an independent small school under the control of the local community.

Fifty children are currently enrolled at the school with the full primary spectrum up to eleven years being covered as well as a nursery. The maximum number of children the school can take is between sixty and seventy children, although there will never be more than fourteen in a particular year group.

The purpose of the school is to provide a free education to the children who reside in the parishes of Priors Marston and the neighbouring village of Priors Hardwick. Children with special educational needs are only accepted if it is felt that the school can attend to their particular needs without detrimentally affecting the education of the other children.

In accordance with the deeds, parents of local children are not charged fees, neither are they requested to make a voluntary financial contribution as is the case in a number of small schools connected with Human Scale Education. They do, however, help with fund-raising and perform tasks in the school that help to reduce the overall running costs. Approximately five children attend from outside the parishes of Priors Marston and Priors Hardwick and those pay fees. In the prospectus the fees are listed as being £750 - £950 per term depending on the child's age, but in reality generous bursaries are offered so that full fees are rarely charged. Most of the school's running costs are met by exceptionally effective fund raising efforts and David Adams, the Chairman of the Trustees, says that the school currently has no financial problems. He feels that much of the success of the school's fundraising is due to keeping a high profile and always aiming high. For example, the school is now organising its third Annual Ball with over 500 tickets on sale at £45 - £50 each. The school's first Annual Ball raised £13,000, and the second one raised £30,000! In addition, donations have been received from famous individuals as well as from local groups and businesses.

38

The school bases its philosophy on what it calls "traditional educational values" with a Christian ethos. It teaches the National Curriculum, and administers the government's SATS. The prospectus states: *"We use the National Curriculum programmes of study to plan what is taught in each subject at each level, and the attainment targets to help us assess the pupil's level of achievement."*

The school employs two full time teachers in the main school and the children are divided into two classes according to age. Within each class the children are sub divided into smaller groups for activities such as the Literacy Hour. In addition to the National Curriculum subjects, French is taught to all the pupils. As part of its physical education programme, a range of activities is offered within the school and the extensive facilities of a local sports club are used for activities such as tennis, soccer, cricket and other field sports. Swimming lessons are held off-site from the spring half-term to the end of the summer term each year. The school also employs specialist teachers for music and French.

The school curriculum covers environmental issues as part of the National Curriculum programme, although it is an area that is not given high priority within the school. Aluminium cans are collected, however, in order to be recycled and to raise funds for the school.

Staff at the school feel that one of the advantages of being small is that a wide ability range can be taught and the small numbers ensure that the needs of individual children are met. Furthermore, it is much easier to be adaptable and flexible in a small school.

The Priors School is run by the community and is very much at the heart of village life. Senior citizens enjoy a lunch at the school once a fortnight and there are regular coffee mornings held at the school which the wider community can attend. There are strong links with the two local churches with the children attending the Harvest Festival at one and a service every Friday morning at the other. Links have also been established with a local grant-maintained school which the older boys visit for fencing lessons and football. In return a party of junior pupils from that school have joined up with children at The Priors School for a geography project. A local farmer allows the school to use his farm as a learning resource and, although he usually charges for such a service, he lets The Priors School use it as a free facility. Members of the community help to support the school in many other ways by offering their services and supporting the fund-raising events.

Although the children make some decisions relating to their own work within the classroom situation, they are bound to a degree by the constraints of the National Curriculum. It is not the policy of the school to have children involved in decision making relating to the running of the school.

The school is a registered charity and is managed by a group of trustees who deal with the financial aspects of the school, legal requirements and staff appointments. The day to day running of the school and curriculum matters are delegated to the teachers.

One of the problems the school has encountered has been the difficulty of gaining the support and approval from some members of the community who do not have children able to benefit from the school and who have felt that a disproportionate amount of time and effort is being spent on school fund raising activities within the village. Another problem has been that, every time a new batch of parents joins the school, a great deal of time and effort needs to be

39

spent re-visiting the structure and history of the school and explaining why parents have to contribute so much of their time giving practical help within the school and fund raising.

When asked what lessons had been learned from this project, David Adams said *"Set standards very high and don't compromise. If we do the job right, people will come. You have to have a lot of confidence."*

EDUCARE SMALL SCHOOL

12 Cowleaze Road, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey, KT2 6DZ

Tel. 0181 547 0144

Educare Small School opened in February 1997, being the brainchild of Elizabeth Steinthal. Liz was the deputy head at a state run primary school before opening Educare but she was became more and more disillusioned with what the state system was able to offer. She had had a dream of opening her own alternative style school for some time, a school where classes would be small, children would be given lots of individual attention and an atmosphere of co-operation, rather than competition, would exist between the children. She decided that the time had come to make her dream a reality. Supported by her husband, an accountant, and investing their own money, she did!

"The Educare Concept grew from a concern that a large number of young children experience failure in school. Early difficulties with learning have lasting effects on children's self-esteem and the inability to communicate effectively on all levels is proven to be the base of much of the crime and disaffection in our society. The cause of most children's failure appears to lie in the inflexibility of the educational system which surrounds them and not within the child."

Opening paragraph of Educare's first prospectus.

The school has now been open for two years and has thirty-five children on roll. The maximum the school intends to take is fifty children aged from three to eleven years.

The school is not aimed at children with any particular learning difficulties. Some of the older children, however, did experience learning difficulties in their previous schools but in the supportive environment of Educare their difficulties have been overcome.

The school's sole major source of income since opening has been from the fees which are set at £850 per term. Parents fundraise on a regular basis and eventually sources of grants and sponsorship will be explored. In the near future the school is introducing a bursary fund in order to make the school more accessible to families who are unable to afford the current level of fees.

Educare Small School values a truly holistic education, aiming to cater for the whole needs of each individual child emphasising emotional and spiritual development. The aims are:

- *To help children to identify themselves as valued members of a secure group from which they can grow into confident, aspiring adults*
- *To foster the spiritual and moral growth of each child as an individual and as a part of a wider community*

- *To develop independent learners with an enthusiasm for learning who are able to organise their own learning effectively, make choices, and interact within a stimulating and creative environment*

- *To encourage the children to achieve an appropriate level of communication through language, mathematics, science, creative arts and information technology*

Educare Prospectus

The National Curriculum is referred to for planning purposes particularly in relation to Maths, English and Science but it is not followed rigidly. The government SATS are sometimes used for internal assessment with certain children where they are useful, or when children transfer to other schools.

The children are split roughly into two age groups. The kindergarten group, with the children aged from three years to five or six years, has a maximum of sixteen children with a teacher and an assistant. The twenty-one children currently in the older group are taught in small groups of mixed ages with two teachers and an assistant.

The most distinctive aspect of the curriculum is the use of various techniques to help the children relax, to create periods of stillness and perform simple exercises in order to create a spiritual balance of mind and body. Educare is probably the only school in the world where the whole school attempts to apply the principles of the Alexander Technique under the guidance of an Alexander Teacher. A Movement Circle of exercises designed to calm and tone the whole body is practised for ten minutes daily before work begins and there is a fifteen minute period of quiet meditation after lunch when children are encouraged to focus on inner thoughts or listen to music.

The school is concerned with teaching the children about environmental values. It has its own active transport policy which encourages the parents to use public transport and to walk or cycle to school with their children. Car parking spaces outside the school are restricted but bicycle racks have been provided. In the school the children are encouraged to recycle as much as possible. A local recycling centre supplies the school regularly with off-cuts of paper and card and other useful recycled products. The outside play area was originally a concrete car park and has been developed into a garden and play area using railway sleepers, tyres and other items. The school has just finished a project funded by an Arts Council lottery grant which involved the children working with community artists to develop the garden and play area further. The children used their own designs to work outdoors in wood and mosaic three-dimensional work and sculpture.

When asked how the school made the most of being small Liz Steinthal replied:

"We give the children as much individual attention as possible and allow them to move on at their own pace. Being small also enables the school to draw on community values. We value and respect everyone's contribution to the school and listen to everyone's voice."

The school has started to build links with the wider community. It works with local colleges and schools to provide work experience for students and in the coming year it will work with B.Ed. students at Roehampton Institute. It also provides work experience opportunities for

students from Kingston University. Links have been forged with the local recycling centre and a nearby office recently donated some chairs to the school.

The children are not generally involved in planning the curriculum but they are given opportunities to make choices and have their say within lesson time. Every Friday the whole school gets together for Circle Time, usually chaired by the head, when the children are encouraged to discuss problems and say what they have enjoyed during the week. Autonomy and independence are important features of the school.

Educare is a registered charity with the headteacher and three other trustees being responsible for all the financial and legal aspects relating to the school. The staff as a team take responsibility for managing the curriculum.

One of the main problems that the school has experienced is dealing with people who cannot afford the fees but whose children would benefit from joining the school community. Another problem is the pressure that local state schools sometimes put parents under because all the local schools are oversubscribed. This has resulted in some parents becoming over-anxious and taking a state school place when offered one.

An important lesson learned from this project is that you can never have any fixed ideas about how something is going to be. The school has developed very differently from what was expected. As the school unfolds and grows in numbers of pupils and as the original group of children get older the school has to change and adapt. This can create new problems which have to be solved as they arise. For example, the pressures from the local state primary schools were not anticipated. The problem of people who cannot afford the fees is being addressed by setting up a bursary fund. Liz Steinthal concludes:

"What is already apparent is that it is possible for a small group of people to create a school which can influence the future."

THE GALLOWAY SMALL SCHOOL

Carnsalloch, Kirkton, Dumfries, DG1 1SL. Tel. 01387 254924

The Galloway Small School first opened in temporary premises in September 1997 as an independent day school. After another temporary move, the school eventually moved to Carronbridge Village, 15 miles north of Dumfries, Scotland in 1998. The school has now moved into yet more new premises and has opened its doors to boarders. It hopes to be able to raise the necessary funding to make Carnsalloch its permanent home.

"Carnsalloch is the property we were looking for back in 1997 but didn't find. The last two years have been about holding the group together and consolidating it where possible around a school that was struggling to grow against adversity because the site was wrong. .....We can see with greater clarity what the problems were now that we are moving into the house that is what we want in all ways and what we are determined to secure as patrimony of the school forever more." The Galloway Small School Newsletter, August 1999.

The motivation for starting The Galloway Small School was the closure in July 1997 of Kilquhanity House School after fifty-seven years of operation. A group of former parents, staff and pupils wanted to see the spirit, meaning and purpose of Kilquhanity continue after its closure. Set up by John Aitkenhead who was strongly influenced by A S Neill's Summerhill, Kilquhanity had been a pioneering force in innovative independent education and Richard Jones, who was the head at the time of its closure became headteacher of The Galloway Small School. Richard and his wife, Vivien, were the driving force behind the setting up of the new school.

When The Galloway Small School first opened it had nine pupils. It now has twelve pupils and hopes to expand to cater eventually for up to forty children. At the moment the school takes only secondary pupils from eleven to seventeen years. Plans are already being made, however, to introduce a primary level in the near future.

The school is not aimed at any particular type of pupil but by its very nature attracts children who are unable to cope in mainstream education because of learning difficulties or behavioural problems. Some pupils are referred to the school by the local education authority because it has decided that the kind of education on offer is the most appropriate for these children. Richard believes that it is important to have a balance of pupils and he doesn't want the school to be seen as a special school. A number of the pupils, including four from Japan, are at the school because their parents believe in the underlying philosophy.

The school is funded mainly by fee payments from parents and fees paid by the local authority for referred children. The school is involved in fundraising activities and has received donations from a wide circle of supporters and well-wishers. The school has been fortunate in receiving some lottery funding to set up their learning support area.

Explaining the philosophy of the school briefly Richard Jones says:

"The children learn at their own rate and there is an emphasis on creqtive activity, an emphasis on negotiation and on the potential to change schemes by talking things over where

appropriate. We are looking at the whole of a person's growth - academic, personal and social."

The school adheres to the 5 - 14 Curriculum Guidelines currently in force in Scotland. The pupils are entered for Standard Grade exams (the equivalent of GCSEs) in Maths; English; Science; Art and Design; and Craft and Design if they are felt to be appropriate to the individual pupil's needs. In the future the school hopes to offer exam courses in humanities and modern languages. Although the English SATS are not applicable in Scotland, the school chooses not to carry out the Scottish equivalent.

Some activities within the school involve the pupils in working across the age groups, particularly for practical subjects, project work, information technology, sports and the general running of the school. Subjects such as Maths and Science are taught at the specific level to small groups of pupils - perhaps two or three pupils at a time.

One of the distinctive aspects of the curriculum is the way in which every day starts with twenty minutes of 'useful work' when the pupils and staff together clean the building, empty bins and generally prepare the school for the day ahead. Vivien Jones explained:

"We are trying to instil a sense of personal responsibility into the children - that is, if we make a mess, we clean it up. This has a very broad end product as far as we're concerned. We think we are making for good citizenship and, in particular, good relationships in later life."

The school is very much a 'making' school where practical and creative skills are strongly promoted. The workshop is a distinctive feature of the school and there is a busy art room, both of which are in constant use throughout the day. Impromptu musical activities frequently take place during breaks and free periods when pupils may be heard strumming their guitars or practising their recorders.

The move to the new premises means that the school can now realise its environmental aspirations. Recycling will be strongly promoted. Healthy food and home cooking have always been a part of the school and this will continue. Eventually the school may grow its own vegetables and have its own compost heap. Any new buildings at the new premises will be designed and built to be eco-friendly.

The school makes the most of being small by getting to know each child as an individual and empowering pupils to negotiate their own curriculum. Some children can cope with this level of responsibility but the school is in a position to help and guide those who are not yet ready to make such choices.

The school values its links with the wider community and, whilst in Carronbridge, the school developed links with local businesses, other schools and colleges and environmental organisations. The school attended Community Council Meetings, allowed its premises to be used for village functions and held open days which the local people attended. Links have already started to be forged in the community that the school has moved to: negotiations are currently taking place to enable the local Arts Association to use workshop space within the school in return, perhaps, for running some special sessions with the pupils. The school intends to help the local economy by using the Market Garden, down the road from the new school, for fresh food supplies.

Staff and pupils run the school together democratically and this is a key feature of the school. There is a weekly Council Meeting which is chaired and scribed by the pupils where information is exchanged, problems are discussed in a responsible way and any misdemeanours are dealt with. On one occasion the pupils 'brought up' the headteacher for breaking a sheet of glass in the workshop, making him undertake to replace it and constantly reminding him until he did. The pupils are actively involved in planning their own curriculum within the limitations of the school resources and staffing available.

The school is registered as a company limited by guarantee and is run by a board of nine directors made up of four staff members, three supporters (invited for their outside expertise) and two parents. The directors meet once a month to discuss school policy, recruitment and marketing, issues relating to school inspection, care related issues and financial issues.

Regarding problems that have been experienced, these relate mainly to premises and funding. The school's first premises were shared with another group whilst awaiting a move to an unused village school. However, this move fell through and they were unable to go ahead with their original plans. Eventually another unused village school was found but yet another move to different temporary premises was necessary whilst alterations and repairs were carried out. Funding issues and low pay for staff are likely to remain ongoing problems until such time as the government decides to fund schools such as The Galloway Small School.

The main lesson to be learned from this project is that patience and perseverance pay off in the long run. Finding suitable premises is always a difficult task in the setting up of a new school but staff and children overcame more than one disappointment before settling into their Carronbridge building after lots of hard work. And now their dream of finding an ideal property in which to form a boarding community seems to have been realised.

46

THE SMALL SCHOOL, BATH

Brookleaze Buildings, Larkhall, Bath, Somerset, BA1 6RA

Tel. 01225 332220

The Small School, Bath, opened in its present form in September 1997 in the premises previously occupied by the Bath Small School. Although *Human Scale Education* values influenced both schools, they are recognised as two distinct and separate projects.

The original Bath Small School ran for four years from September 1993 until July 1997 when a decision was made to close it. The main reason for its closure was that most of the children who had been with the school since its inception had completed their GCSEs and were due to leave the school. The school had been supported for its entire four year duration by a very active group of parents who ensured the smooth running of the school. It was felt that, after they left, the school would not be able to function in the same way. However, after its closure a rescue plan was put into operation and the school re-opened in September 1997 with a new constitution and the new name of The Small School, Bath.

"In July 1997, eight pupils of the (original) Bath Small School achieved successful pass rates in up to eight subjects at GCSE and have all moved on to colleges and sixth forms. However, despite a relatively healthy bank balance, the founding parents felt that there was insufficient support amongst the few remaining parents to make the school viable and reluctantly announced the closure of the school. Over the summer holidays, nonetheless, a small group of ex-parents and teachers felt that the school had been such a wonderful success for those who had attended that some attempt ought to be made to continue, so that other young people could benefit from such a unique education."

Richard Seccombe, Human Scale Education Newsletter, July 1998.

It is now almost two years since the new small school was formed and numbers have grown dramatically from just three pupils when the school first opened to fifteen at the end of the first year. Currently there are twenty pupils. The maximum number of pupils the school intends to take is twenty-five.

The original Bath Small School was a secondary school. When the new Small School opened, it started its life as a middle school taking children from the ages of nine to thirteen years. It was decided at the outset that the school would grow with its pupils until it eventually became a school catering for pupils aged nine to sixteen years.

The school is not aimed at any particular kind of child but a few of the children have special educational needs. The school is wary of accepting children with behavioural problems and feels that if such a child were accepted they would need to carefully monitor the situation and enlist parental support.

The Small School does not receive any trust funding or charitable donations but survives on fund raising (25% of income), parental contributions (40% of income) and income raised from letting out space (35% of income). This year the school raised additional funds at the Glastonbury Music Festival where it was given the opportunity to run a cafe and use the

proceeds to fund the school. The suggested monthly contribution for parents is £150 but the actual contribution is negotiated at a special interview. Less than half the parents currently pay anywhere near the full amount. Part-time teachers are paid £10.00 per hour and the two full-time staff work for a very low salary indeed. Parents teach in the school in a voluntary capacity.

When the original Bath Small School closed and was replaced by The Small School, Bath, in September 1997, the overall direction and philosophy of the school changed though it continued to hold beliefs about the benefits of education on a human scale. Richard Seccombe became the new headteacher and led the school forward with a new vision by introducing a Waldorf/Steiner style curriculum.

The Small School does not follow the National Curriculum at Key Stages 2 and 3, but from September 1999 Key Stage 4 (GCSE level) is being taught because of the decision made at the outset that the upper age limit of the school would grow naturally with the pupils. Up to eight subjects are offered at GCSE level: Maths, double English, double Science, Humanities, Art, and Business Studies. The school does not carry out the government SATS at the end of Key Stages 2 and 3.

There are three main teaching groups within the school: the GCSE group, the twelve to fourteen age group and the nine to eleven age group. The groups have a certain amount of flexibility and pupils can swap groups if it is thought that their needs would be better met in a different group. During the afternoon sessions these groups are abandoned and all the children work together on non-academic subjects.

The most distinctive aspect of the curriculum is the Waldorf / Steiner approach. Each day starts with a Main Lesson which is related to a topic usually running for four to six weeks. This period is followed by more conventional subject lessons until lunchtime. The afternoon sessions offer creative activities for the children including drama, local studies, arts and crafts and games. The children are also involved in cooking the lunch. During the latter half of the summer term each year the school replaces its usual timetable with Special Weeks (as pioneered by the Hartland Small School). Recent special weeks have been devoted to writing and performing a play; environmental studies on a farm in Pembrokeshire; the Glastonbury music festival; offering help in the local community; learning how to survive in woodland (building shelters out of hazel and sleeping in them); and an activity holiday in Snowdonia.

School policy and the curriculum are underpinned to a certain extent by environmental values, although this is an area which the school would like to develop more actively. The pupils learned about some environmental issues and gained a better understanding of the natural world recently during the Special Weeks. The school uses green bins and some recycling takes place.

One of the advantages of being small is that everybody knows everybody else. There are no divisions of children as seen in larger schools and this becomes even more apparent in the Special Weeks when everyone works together as a team. The close relationships that are established with parents are also a very good thing in many respects. At times, however, parents' needs seem to become as great as the children's and this can cause problems.

People in the locality are reasonably sympathetic to The Small School and the children seem to have gained a reputation within the community of being polite and friendly. The school

also serves the purpose of being a community centre for the local village with a number of different groups hiring rooms. The income from the lettings pays one teacher's salary.

With regard to democratic practice each day starts and ends with Circle Time, giving the children the opportunity for general discussion. They can share difficulties and discuss solutions to any problems. The pupils have limited input in deciding curriculum issues but their views are taken into consideration. The school holds a General Meeting for staff, parents and pupils every three weeks.

The school is registered as a company limited by guarantee and 'top-level' decisions relating to the financial or legal aspects of the school are dealt with by the directors of the limited company. The general running of the school, however, is the overall responsibility of the Core Management Group, which is the central working group made up of parents and staff members who meet regularly to discuss school issues. The headteacher and teaching staff have responsibility for the day to day running of the school.

As a relatively new school The Small School, Bath, is experiencing problems similar to other small schools in their early stages. One of these problems is parental expectations of what the school should be. Some parents, perhaps those who have experience of home educating their children, think that the school is too formal; whereas others parents, perhaps those who think that the school is an affordable form of independent education, think that the school is not formal enough. Richard Seccombe would like to think that parents choose the school for their child as a positive step, but this isn't always the case: sometimes it is a last resort. Accepting children with a background of problems, or those who have negative attitudes towards school can cause great difficulties and upset children who are already settled at the school. Financing the school is also a problem, and the school can only survive with constant fundraising, parental help and teachers working on very low salaries.

Various lessons have been learned from this project. It is important in a small school never to accept too many new children at one time, as the whole school balance can easily be upset. Children who have built up good relationships with staff and have positive attitudes towards the school can easily be affected by new pupils coming in with negative attitudes. Any school is only as good as the people who run it and it is important that the utmost use is made of the staff's skills. In this respect management skills are also very important. Repeating something Colin Hodgetts, of The Small School, Hartland, once said to him, and which he feels is very true, Richard Seccombe concludes:

"Every year you re-invent the school. It is never static, it's always changing."

49